

## **Low-Rent Housing Lists Adding Names**

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Middlesex County residents seeking help with their rent payments have more opportunities to get on waiting lists for two assistance programs.

A mail-in application process will add another 300 names to a waiting list for a county-administered Section 8 program. And the state Department of Community Affairs last week started a mail-in application process that will add 1,000 people to a waiting list for a rent-subsidy voucher program.

Although county housing officials believe an initial list begun last month with 300 names to be mostly legitimate, they decided to reopen the waiting list after receiving a significant number of complaints about how it was compiled.

Residents must mail in completed applications postmarked either Aug. 14 or Aug. 15 to the Middlesex County Public Housing Agency in New Brunswick.

The agency will then hold a lottery to select an additional 300 people for the list. Those people will then be asked to complete a more detailed application to determine their assistance eligibility. The second set of 300 applicants, starting with the 301st name, will then be placed on the waiting list started last month.

The mail-in will not affect those applications already received last month.

County housing officials have emphasized that not all 600 people will even get the chance to receive Section 8 vouchers, which form part of a federally funded initiative that helps qualifying, usually very low-income, residents pay for private-market apartments on a sliding scale basis.

Actual vouchers become available through the county agency at the rate of only 35 or 40 a year.

The agency must give out 75 percent of the Section 8 vouchers to people who are of extremely low income, generally calculated at 30 percent of median income. In Middlesex County, that means \$20,000 for one person, with incremental increases in income for each additional family member. For example, the 30 percent median income figure for a family of four is \$28,600.

The state program, which has income limits of \$33,400 for one person and up to \$62,950 for eight people, allows participants to pay no more than 40 percent of their incomes for rents.

The U.S. House of Representatives last month overwhelmingly passed legislation intended to streamline the federal program and that would allow for the creation of additional vouchers. A companion bill is expected to be taken up by the Senate later this year.